

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1550

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to improving educational opportunities for low-income students.

Brief Description: Supporting the state achievers' scholarship program.

Sponsors: Representatives Santos, McCoy, P. Sullivan, McDermott, Roberts, Kagi, Hasegawa, Tom, Sells, Kenney, Kilmer and Talcott.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/9/05, 2/14/05 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Appropriates \$2 million from the State General Fund to support community volunteer mentors of high school students selected as achiever scholars.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis, Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Santos, Shabro and Tom.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

In 2000, the Washington Education Foundation (WEF) was created to provide scholarships and mentors to low-income students who exhibit high potential for academic success. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has committed \$100 million to create the Washington State Achievers Scholarship (Achievers Scholarship) program to provide college scholarships to motivated students from 16 high-poverty schools with diverse ethnic populations. Other private donors also sponsor scholarship programs through the WEF. In addition to providing scholarships, the Achievers Scholarship program matches students with a mentor to assist in the college preparation and application processes. Under the Hometown Mentor program, community involvement officers recruit, train, and match community volunteer mentors with students in their junior year of high school. Hometown mentorship continues until the student enters college, at which time a college mentor is provided.

The WEF reports approximately 2,114 volunteer mentors have been matched with students at the 16 participating high schools since the program began. Community involvement officers may work with up to 240 volunteer mentors at one time. In the 2003-05 biennium \$1 million from the State General Fund was provided to support the Hometown Mentor program.

Summary of Bill:

In each of the fiscal years ending June 30, 2006, and June 30, 2007, \$1 million is appropriated from the state general fund to the Superintendent of Public Instruction to support community volunteers in the Hometown Mentor program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The stories generated from the students who have been awarded an Achievers Scholarship show how important this bill is. It will help boost academic achievement and carry students into the higher education system. The graduation rates of many of our state's minority populations are very challenging, particularly when students don't see themselves as potential college attendees. This bill will help create more opportunities for these students to envision themselves as successful college students.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board reports that the entry rate and future success rate of our college students is much more sustained when we can get students to high school graduation with sustained motivation for continued academic success.

The Achievers Scholarship program's goal is to provide college scholarships and mentorships to low-income high-potential students. Despite the millions of dollars raised, money alone is not enough. The mentor program is crucial to the continued success of the program. The Hometown Mentor program is a huge lever for the state in providing mentors for approximately 1,100 scholarship recipients while they are in high school. The program sometimes works with students who many may believe will never make it to college. These are the students who often times may have to help pay for the family living expenses or fulfill care-taking roles for siblings or other family members. These are the students who don't usually have the family or home support of most college-bound students. The program has been phenomenally successful and the work of the mentors is essential to that success and the success of students. Many Achiever Scholars exceed the minimum college entry requirements.

Students who are working to help support their families may lose track of their college plans. Mentors help these students maintain their focus and their vision for a better future for

themselves. One-third of our state's students are low-income students. At the higher education level, Washington is ranked 46th for upper-division college participation rates. Despite this, we can educate ourselves out of poverty. We owe it to our citizens to give them the best education possible and if they are prepared to go to college, we should be prepared to help them attend and graduate from college. This is cost-effective and well-designed and is one of the best dropout prevention programs around. The scholarships and the mentor program are good community involvement models for helping students jump through the college hurdles.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Santos, prime sponsor; Bob Craves, Washington Education Foundation; Colleen Philbrook, community involvement officer; Amaria Price and Micheal Rios, students, Foss High School; Robert Butts, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Don Rash, Association of Washington School Principals.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.